

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 479

FL 017 420

AUTHOR Steer, Jocelyn
TITLE Dialogue Journal Writing for Academic Purposes.
PUB DATE Mar 88
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (22nd, Chicago, IL, March 8-13, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; College Students; Comparative Analysis; *English (Second Language); *English for Academic Purposes; *Foreign Students; Higher Education; Second Language Instruction; Skill Development; Teacher Student Relationship; Thematic Approach; *Writing Exercises; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Dialogue Journals

ABSTRACT

The teacher of a class of pre-university students of English as a second language at the high-intermediate level assesses the usefulness of dialogue journal writing to develop second language skills and to promote better writing. The course emphasized essay-writing, not technical writing, and was organized around thematic units using a textbook. Students were required to write a dialogue journal entry for each class meeting and encouraged to write about their experiences with English writing and their responses to content presented in class. Research on several aspects of journal writing (the teacher-student interaction it allows, the sense of audience it promotes, its role in developing pre-writing strategies, and its use as a mode of exploring ideas) is reviewed and the concepts are illustrated in excerpts from student journals. The benefits to the teacher and concerns expressed by the students are also discussed. The first and last entries in one student's journal are presented for comparison. (MSE)

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ED295479

DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING
FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

Jocelyn Steer
The American Language Institute
San Diego State University

Paper presented at the 22nd Annual TESOL Convention
8-13 March 1988, Chicago, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This paper will report on an experiment in using dialogue journal writing in a high-intermediate writing class for pre-university ESL students. It will show that research supports the use of this technique in an ESL class to develop second language acquisition and that, in fact, the use of dialogue journals can promote better academic writing. The paper will draw on current research in composition, content-based ESL, and interactive language teaching. excerpts from student and teacher journals, and the results of a questionnaire given to students at the end of the semester.

DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

After several years as a writing teacher, I have become very adept at identifying a particular look on my students' faces when I assign them topics or themes to write about. This "glazed look" is often accompanied by a groan--never mind that the topic is as banal as the dangers of television or as provoking as the rights of children with AIDs. It occurred to me that the traditional "write-a-five-paragraph-essay-on-the-following-topic" approach to writing was not the only way to inspire students. I began experimenting with other types of assignments--group projects, student books, newsletters, letter writing-- which I hoped would engage the student more actively and spark his interest. One type which I found to be particularly effective for my ESL writing classes was dialogue journal writing.

This paper will report on an experiment in using dialogue journal writing in a high-intermediate writing class for pre-university ESL students. It will show that research supports the use of such writing in an ESL class to develop second language acquisition and that, in fact, the use of dialogue journals can promote better academic writing. The paper will draw on current research, excerpts from student and teacher journals, and the results of a questionnaire given to students at the end of the semester.

DESCRIPTION OF WRITING-C CLASS

Writing C consisted of 19 pre-university students from a variety of countries -- Indonesia, France, Iceland, Oman, Kuwait, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Thailand. Their level of English proficiency was high intermediate, with entering TOEFL scores ranging from 450-500. The assigned text for this writing level was Writing Academic English by Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue, a text which uses a traditional pattern-centered approach to writing paragraphs and essays of an academic nature. In the past, the units

of the semester-long course had been organized around these rhetorical forms. By the end of the semester, Writing C students were to have moderate control of the five-paragraph essay form. Research writing was not addressed at this level: students continuing in the program would tackle that task the following semester.

During the semester in question, I maintained the textbook and the emphasis on essay writing. However, I altered the course in two important ways: 1) The course was organized around thematic units rather than rhetorical patterns: 2) Dialogue journal writing was a requirement of the class.

INTRODUCTION OF CONTENT

The units of the course were organized around areas of content of interest to the student. Rather than use a rhetorical pattern to shape the unit, a theme was introduced and explored together as a class through readings and discussion. The topics for essay writing naturally evolved from the ideas and information covered in class. Consequently, the type of organizational thought pattern used in these essays was determined by the essay topic and not vice versa. The themes covered during the semester included: Business, Urban Problems and American Culture. The first two were not as successful as the latter. Two-thirds of the semester addressed various aspects of American culture: basic values, the family, and marriage. Readings related to the American culture theme were taken from The American Way by Edward and Mary Ann Eagan and Jo Ann Crandall.

DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING

An important requirement of the class included a dialogue journal writing activity. Students wrote a journal entry for each class meeting. These were written on separate sheets of paper and then kept in a looseleaf notebook. Based on a similar procedure outlined in Spack and Sadow (1983), I also wrote

a journal entry for each class meeting which I photocopied for the entire⁴ class. At the start of each class we exchanged our journals. I then allowed five minutes of class time for reading. Exchanging journals at the start of class seemed to encourage students to be on time for the very early 8:00 a.m. class. Students who did arrive late always made sure they got a copy of my journal at the break, and those who missed class caught me in the hall to exchange journals. They were never so eager to retrieve other class handouts or to hand in late assignments!

I then took their journals home and responded to each one individually, commenting on the content, answering questions, asking for further information. I did not correct the mechanics of the journal nor did I give them a grade for each entry. However, to emphasize the importance of the assignment and to encourage regular journal writing, students were given a pass/fail grade for the assignment at the end of the semester which counted for 15% of their final grade.

CONTENT OF JOURNALS

To avoid the "what I did this weekend" type of diary writing, it was important to offer students guidelines for content. Two areas were suggested:

1. Their experiences as writers

In this regard, students were encouraged to record their day-to-day experiences with learning to write in a second language. It was hoped that by encouraging students to write down the joys and frustrations of learning to write, they would gain insight into the process itself. Students were free to discuss their feelings about the class itself, noting activities which they found useful or those which they simply did not like.

2. Response to content presented in class

Since a great deal of class time was devoted to reading and discussing the selected themes, students were encouraged to elaborate on the topics, adding additional information, disagreeing with their teacher's or classmates' opinions, recounting related anecdotal information. As the assigned essays resulted from our exploration of these chosen themes, I anticipated that these journal entries could provide valuable pre-writing material for their formal writing.

Many students adhered to the journal guidelines presented at the beginning of the course. Several, however, found them much too confining. One French student expressed a desire to record all her experiences here in the U.S. She wrote:

May I ask a question? I do not understand why you do not want us to speak about personal experiences in the U.S.? The exercise will be the same. We have to seek after words, we would improve our vocabulary and our grammar. (Christine)

A few students disregarded the guidelines entirely, persisting in writing about their daily activities, falling into the diary syndrome. It is interesting to note that these were the students who were irregular in both their journal writing and their performance in the class.

The obvious advantages of dialogue journal writing may initially strike the teacher: students are writing regularly; they seem to enjoy the process; at the end of the semester students have a hefty sheaf of papers covered with their own writing. Clearly, pleasure and quantity are important elements in any composition class. Nevertheless, since these students are under a great deal of pressure in terms of time and financial resources to gain the necessary skills for university work, the question of efficiency becomes instrumental in designing class activities. The following section will now examine the technique of dialogue journal writing more closely to determine if research in second language acquisition and composition supports the use of

dialogue journal writing as an efficient tool for increasing student ability to cope with university writing.

INTERACTION

In a traditional writing class, students produce a polished piece of writing on a given topic, submit it to the instructor who then "corrects" and grades the assignment based on a variety of factors: mechanics, organization, clarity and occasionally, content. Little interaction between teacher and student ensues from this process. Perhaps the teacher poses questions in the margin when meaning in the composition breaks down. Any student who chooses to answer such a rhetorical question as "What do you mean here?" would be responding inappropriately to what is really a request for clarification of a murky sentence. Teachers also communicate with symbols or numbers to indicate errors in form. Occasionally, students will (inappropriately) communicate their feelings at the end of the assignment with "Thank you and have a nice day."

Nor should students be writing personal messages in a formal essay. Yet, in classes where formal writing is the only mode introduced, students and teachers are ignoring an extremely vital aspect of developing second language fluency-- interaction, or what Rivers has called "the give and take of message exchanges" (Rivers, 1987, p.5).

Krashen also emphasizes the need for this written exchange of messages: Acquisition does not happen by practicing speaking or writing and getting feedback on the correctness of form. It happens when we understand messages in the second language, when we understand what is said or written, rather than how it is expressed, when we focus on meaning and not form. (Krashen, 1984, p. 21)

Yet Krashen maintains that we "acquire [language] in only one way--via comprehensible input", (1984, p.21) basing his claim on models of first language acquisition, in which normal children rely on "one-way communication"

and endure a "silent period" of language acquisition before attempting two-way, or interactive, communication (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982). Rivers disputes this claim by citing research revealing that such two-way communication does in fact exist for babies as young as two months who use their lips and hands to express meaning and interact with speaking adults. Another study of children of deaf parents further indicates that mere input--such as in the form of television--cannot alone produce language acquisition. The element of interaction with another human being is necessary.

Thus we can see that it is not simply "input" in the form of reading, or feedback in the form of correction that will enable students to be better writers. Equally important is the written negotiation of meaning between the reader and the writer who engage in "the give and take of message exchange."

Dialogue journal writing allows this two-way communication in a very realistic context and satisfies the three criteria of a "communicative task" as described by Morrow (1981). An information gap is naturally created by the exchange of questions between the teacher and the student. Rarely is a display question presented in a journal for the purpose of simply manipulating a structure, as a teacher might do in a structure class ("What am I wearing today?"). Secondly, the element of choice is present since students generate their own topics for the journal. Finally, the writer's intention in writing is related to the reader's feedback: in other words, what the student writes is in part dictated by the teacher's response in her previous journals or comments to the student.

This two-way communication can also turn into three-way communication: student-teacher-the class as evidenced in the following example. One student, interested in improving her study techniques, wrote:

There has long been a question about writing in my head.... I use three dictionaries, English-English, English-Japanese and Japanese English. Do

you think this is a good way to study writing?... In other words, would⁸ you suggest if there is a more efficient procedure for writing?

Sometimes I wonder how other students study at home? (Fujiko)

I seized this opportunity to ask this very question in my next journal to the class:

Fujiko asked a question in one of her journals and I thought I would present this question to all of you: "How do you study writing at home? What do you do to become a better writer? If you answer in your next journal, I will let Fujiko know.

The response was quite enthusiastic. As the responses came in, I tried to relay them to the entire class in my own journal:

I wanted to tell you what some of you wrote about studying writing at home (Fujiko's question). Riyadh said he reads books on writing to help him with paragraph organization and sentence structure. Lusiana says she is trying to read more. She also said, however, that "it is easier for me to say so than to do so." What an honest person she is!

Students clearly enjoyed the communicative aspect of the journal writing and recognized its importance in increasing their English proficiency. The journals had an additional advantage for the quiet students. In their final questionnaire, two students commented that the journals provided them with a means of "being heard" since they were reluctant to participate in class discussions:

It is silly but I liked (the journals) because I found a way to say something even though I was writing it not saying it because I don't speak a lot so I found it a way to communicate. (Mohammed)

What I liked best about the journals was I could communicate with you. Because I couldn't say anything in our class, it was my only opportunity to talk with you. (Minorl)

Still another student appreciated our "written conversations" so much that when I reverted to typing my journals, she was quite dismayed:

Jocelyn got a typewriter recently. Although these Journals are still as⁹ interesting as before. I don't like to read this model. It looks very formal and like an article without interest. I prefer to read the journals that are written by hand. When I read them I always feel that Jocelyn is talking to me and I like to read these journals very much, especially when I think something is very interesting. I also feel Jocelyn is smiling for these things. (Ming)

SENSE OF AUDIENCE

An additional benefit of interacting in a written mode is the student's realization that his journal entries are actually intended for a specific and real audience, namely the teacher. This discovery is not always immediate, as the following student points out, but once made, can assist the student in writing with a clearer purpose:

I've forgotten we were writing dialogue journals. Therefore, I wrote quite different subjects everytime. You must have been confused after reading my Journals. "She doesn't understand anything!" Please don't be angry. I noticed this is a dialogue journal, so I know what I should do from now on." (Minor)

Such a sense of audience is crucial to good academic writing as well. Flower (1979) has distinguished between "writer-based prose" which "reflects the interior monologue of a writer thinking and talking to himself" and "reader-based prose" which demonstrates a concern for the effect of his writing on the reader. Expert writers have learned to transform these "interior monologues" into prose which is accessible to the reader (Krashen, 1984). Staton (1981) has pointed out that dialogue journals, since they are closer to a student's reality than formal writing, are a "developmental link" between these two types of prose. Indeed, in her own experiment with "learning logs", Blanton (1987) discovered that the journals did provide this link. Her students were asked to describe themselves in both their initial and

final Journal entries of the semester. The first entries were sketchy and lacked the plentiful details and information of the final entries. Blanton maintained that this change demonstrated her students' increased sense of audience. She felt the Journals had helped the writer to understand that the reader was not a mind-reader and, hence, required more information than had been offered in the earlier entries.

DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING AS PRE-WRITING

Even though Journal writers tend to be more conscious of their audience and, hence, achieve more clarity, no student or teacher would accept these Journal entries as polished prose. They do not replace formal writing. However, Journals play an important role in developing pre-writing strategies often entailed in many kinds of academic writing assignments.

Shih (1986) has identified seven pre-writing tasks commonly found in much academic writing:

1. Recalling, sorting, synthesizing, organizing, interpreting and applying information in class (for exams);
2. Drawing up personal experiences and knowledge; reflecting; (for personal essays);
3. Relating ideas in class to personal experiences; (for response essays and Journals);
4. Conducting primary research and collecting data (for research papers and reports);
5. Analyzing data;
6. Getting information from secondary sources;
7. Recasting data and ideas.

Shih maintains that many traditional composition courses do not always teach these pre-writing tasks. A pattern-centered approach encourages students to decide first on the form and then look at ways of fitting the content into the selected rhetorical pattern. This is contrary to what

students will really be asked to do for a university writing assignment, where 11
research into the area of inquiry will always precede decisions regarding
form. Process-oriented classes involving a great deal of brainstorming often
encourage disorder and essays of a highly subjective tone. Such approaches do
not develop the necessary academic skills of interpreting data or recasting
information from multiple sources.

By introducing a content-based approach to a composition class, Shih
claims that students will be exposed to more realistic academic tasks--e.g.
objective writing from sources about specific subject areas with greater
emphasis on what -- rather than how-- it is said.

Dialogue journal writing, when coupled with a content-based approach, can
be a more efficient tool for developing these pre-writing strategies than the
traditional brainstorming-outlining-formal-essay writing procedure. One
important difference is that students have a greater opportunity to write from
sources. By asking students to respond to readings and discussions, the
starting point for their written reaction is the outside source of
information. This develops such skills as recalling, synthesizing,
interpreting and applying information.

My students' journals are full of examples in which students engage in
these tasks. The unit on "Basic American Values" was especially provocative.
Note the thoughtful comments in the following excerpt and the "academic"
quality of the opening lines:

I disagree with a part of the article, "Basic American Values and
Beliefs." The sentence, "In a recent opinion poll, 60 percent of the
American people agreed with this statement: 'It is not healthy for young
people to refuse to believe that winning competition is important' gave
me some doubts. Sometimes too much competitive spirit causes a bother
for other people and is the ruin of oneself. I believe that people need
moderate competition in their lives. In my opinion, competition means
fighting not only with others but also with myself. (Fujiko)

After an especially insightful discussion on the meaning of American freedom, one student was able to apply those ideas to a television program on the Constitution which he had watched later that evening. Although his comments are rough and still subjective, his attempt to relate two sources of information and interpret them resembles pre-writing strategies necessary for exams and short papers.

I liked our discussions about freedom because they helped me to see what America is really like. I saw a TV program last night about the American Constitution. The Constitution means equal rights and civil rights. You can do whatever you want to do. . . . Sometimes, I think it gives too much freedom--guns, drugs and abortion are causing a lot of trouble. People misuse their freedom. I think this is what people call American freedom. (Phil)

Dialogue journals can be quite versatile in their uses; they can serve as a means for reacting or relating sources, but they can also be a "log" for recording observations. This allows practice in the pre-writing strategy of collecting data and reporting on them. At one point in our discussions on American culture, I suggested that students conduct their own experiment by observing proxemics in a variety of situations and report on it in their journals.

Many students submitted entries like the following:

Through this Journal I want to tell you my experiment on "people watching." I observed people who were standing and talking. If they were close friends and male, they stood and talked about two or three feet apart. This seemed closer than a male talking to a female. But if both were female, they stood closer than if both were male. (Robin)

Written reports of experiments are part of many undergraduate and graduate classes. Although I did not exploit this possibility, a logical step would be to have students conduct several similar experiments and then draw conclusions and make generalizations based on their findings.

The beauty of the journals in this regard is that they permit what Shih has called "an incubation period" for the germs of ideas to develop, allowing more input from outside sources before attempting formal writing. This parallels the development of content in a subject class. Over the course of a semester, the students' body of knowledge and understanding in that subject develops slowly. They are required to write papers, but not before weeks of readings and lectures on the given topic. When we ask our ESL students to produce essays after one class discussion or even after no preparation outside of a 15-minute brainstorming session, we are encouraging shallowness of thought and can expect somewhat subjective writing. In doing so, we mislead our students into believing that short papers don't require extensive outside preparation.

That students want and appreciate such an "exploratory stage" (Spack and Sadow, 1983, p.585) became obvious as many Journal writers explored a single theme over five or six journals (three weeks). One particularly successful sequence involved several readings and class discussions on the American family. Ideas and reactions on this theme persisted in their journals for weeks. The final result of their efforts was a comparative essay describing important differences between families in the U.S. and in their countries. Not a particularly original topic, yet their essays were surprisingly informative, insightful and original. I attribute this to the longer "incubation period" during which students gathered input from readings and discussions in addition to mulling over the ideas in their journal entries. As one student wrote, they had something to say:

It seems easy to write when we know what we are going to write, but we try to escape from writing because we don't know what we should write.
(Lusiana)

JOURNAL WRITING AS A MODE OF EXPLORING THOUGHT

The art of writing, in addition to reflecting thought, can itself serve as a facilitator of thought and may in fact even help the writer in the process of writing to shape and refine ideas which are not yet fully formed. (Taylor, 1981:6)

Outlining as a pre-writing strategy can be useful for organizing ideas, but does not permit the development of these ideas nor the recognition of subtle relations between them. Journal writing, on the other hand, can succeed as a mode of exploring thought and carrying ideas to their full maturity (Taylor, 1981). In addition, unlike speaking, writing provides the writer with feedback (Yinger and Clark, 1981). At any given moment, a writer is free to reread her writing to verify its accuracy and sincerity. The dialogue journals permitted students to backtrack, revise, retract as in the following example:

These days I have been thinking about marriage (more than usual) for you asked us to write a composition about an interesting, but hard to define-concept. I have found out that marriage has three sides. People have different points of view: single people, divorced people and married people. This is like when you consider driving a car. When you are 15 and can't drive yourself, when you have driven your car off the road and the wheels are smiling at the sun (I mean upside down on the car) or when you are driving in your luxury limousine in Hollywood. We are married, so we have the Hollywood point of view--at least we should have it!

For this reason I am going to write about the good side of marriage. A few days ago, someone said that marriage could be a prison. Yes, that's true. However, I think marriage is sometimes like a seatbelt--when you get used to it you can't drive without it.

No, now I have changed my mind--that is a woman's right which we should not lose in all this feminist thing. I am going to change the entire essay and write about these different points of view as I mentioned before. The old essay was so boring that it was not fair to expect you to read it through! (Rannveig)

In addition to providing the writer with her own feedback, journal writing "creates a situation of explicitness, often leading to a renewed awareness of what a person knows" (Yinger and Clark, 1981, p.15). By juxtaposing the known with other other pieces of knowledge, as seen in Phil's ability to relate class discussions with a TV program, the journal writer is able to recognize new connections in thought.

Finally, dialogue journal writing provides a "window to process" (Yinger, 1981, p.17), or insight into the procedural knowledge of writing. In an ESL class, students begin to analyze American rhetoric and compare it with writing styles in their own culture. Consider the following excerpt:

In each country, the system of education expects a particular type of construction and development in a composition. In France, for example, students learn to be more logical and empirical than philosophical or imaginary. It seems that in the USA you are expecting far more participation. The students have to involve themselves in their compositions. (Christine)

BENEFITS FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

Dialogue journal writing is not only beneficial for students, but has its advantages for the teacher, as well. For one thing, the journals provide insight into the effectiveness of classroom activities. When I opted to devote a considerable amount of writing class time to discussions and problem-solving activities, I was concerned that the students might perceive this as "busy work" unrelated to developing their academic writing skills. I needn't have worried, as the following journal entry assured me:

I enjoy the method which divides us into several groups to discuss some interesting articles. "How to design a city" to solve all the problems such as traffic, pollution. Maybe we can try to do it again next week.
(Hua Chun)

Students are not the only ones who benefit from expressing their feelings about class activities in the journal. About six weeks into the semester, the honeymoon period had elapsed and students began expressing discontent about the journal writing assignment. "Do you know that writing journals drives me mad?" one student exclaimed in his opening line of an entry. I needed to do some serious selling on the value of journal writing.

Let me try to explain why writing regular journals can help you not only with your writing skills but also with university preparation....

In this class you are not learning a subject like statistics, but you are learning about writing. Becoming aware of your strengths and weaknesses in this area can help you to capitalize on what you do well and improve your areas of weakness. You can't wait for your instructor to tell you everything--he expects you to be independent. (Remember our discussions on the value of independence in the American culture???)

In addition, we have shared some very interesting and provocative ideas in our class discussions. Use the journal to respond to these exchanges.

When I describe the journal writing technique to colleagues, a common response is, "Isn't it an awful lot of work?" Saving time is not one of the advantages. But on more than one occasion, reading a student journal entry has brightened an otherwise hectic and joyless day of teaching. Rannveig's journals were always full of humor, as in the following example:

I suddenly found out the mystery of the USA and the USSR. I was reading about the word, "right" in my dictionary when I found that right has two meanings: i.e. "right-hand side" and "true." My opinion is that the

American people couldn't be communists because right is right! (That is just a joke.) (Rannveig)

And of course, the journals can provide wonderful positive reinforcement for the instructor, especially when this "stroking" occurs at points in the semester when you question your effectiveness in teaching writing:

Writing my last Journal--I must prepare this Journal more carefully than I usually do. I know I am going to miss you, you are a very nice person and a very good teacher. You have even tendered my interest in English! I think that my friends from high school would not believe me if I tried to tell them that. I think my first English course is the cause for my dislike of English. We listened to the BBC news. I still remember that I understood two words, "Indira Gandhi" and "Vietnam." That was all! My interest in English did not wake up until 14 years later. (Rannveig)

CONCERNS

There is no doubt in my mind that the dialogue journal writing experience was of great value to the students and myself. Nevertheless, students expressed two recurring areas of concern in their entries and the final questionnaire. The first concern related to the lack of error correction in the journals. Is it useful to require students to write journals which are not corrected even though these students consistently desire correction and perceive little value in writing something which the teacher does not correct?

There is not one clear answer to this question. On the one hand, by allowing students to make errors "with impunity" (Blanton, 1987, p.114) we are doing two things. First, it reduces student anxiety about making mistakes or lowers their "affective filter." According to Krashen, this allows students to be more receptive to language acquisition. As one student put it in her final questionnaire: "I felt free to write without fear of grades."

Secondly, the freedom to write without correction helps students to understand that writing is not "about getting it right" (Blanton, 1987,

n.111), a true-false test with right and wrong answers. It is a "messy" activity (Blanton, 1987). Research has shown that poor writers' preoccupation with form inhibits their development of ideas (Perl, 1987).

One student expressed this very phenomenon in a journal entry:

I write a lot at home--for example, letters or a diary. Because there are no rules in these cases, I can write them in a short time and smoothly. But when I do my writing homework, it takes a long, long, long time because of lots of rules. To tell the truth, I don't like these rules because I mind these rules more than what I want to say. (Minori)

On the other hand, students' perceptions must also be taken into consideration. One third of the Writing C students indicated that this lack of error correction was the aspect of the journal writing assignment which they liked the least. Student perception does affect the benefits of any assignment.

The second area of student concern related to the choice of topics for the journal. Students repeatedly lamented: "I don't know what to say" or "I don't know how to begin my journals." Despite the guidelines provided at the start of the semester, students were at a loss for choosing something to write about. I purposely did not provide strict guidelines, for I wanted students to generate areas of discussion of interest to them. Clearly, this dilemma of "having something to say" is not solely a journal writing problem. However, if topics had been assigned for each journal, would the expressive and informal qualities of the journal writing be at risk? Would students regard these "assignments" as a request for formal writing? This is clearly an area which needs further exploration and experimentation.

To conclude this discussion on writing dialogue journals, I would like to compare a student's early entry with her final entry. Ming's change in attitude about writing and increased self-confidence as a writer express the value of this technique more convincingly than any instructor could:

September 25, 1987

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I don't like writing journals in English. Because there are a lot of troubles when I writing journals. First, I don't know how to start. Other side, my vocabulary is very poor, not only there are some words and expressions that are very difficulty for me in my sentences. but also these sentences are very drab. Also why I don't like write journals in English. It always takes me a long time very time I write it. . . I often don't like to repeat the sentences I wrote when I complete my journals. That is really dull language. I hope I can write correct and clear sentences after these exercises. I have confidence to reach the objective.

And, indeed, Ming did "reach the objective":

December 1, 1988

Time passed so quickly that I couldn't believe that we will finish this term. Today's journal will be the last assignment. I think I have many things to write. I don't remember how many journals I have written. I just remembered the first time I wrote a journal. I didn't even know how to write the first sentence. And doubted if the teacher can understand my writing with a little "Chinese structure". But when I got the journal returned by the teacher, I was surprised that the teacher not only read my journal carefully but also wrote "good idea" on my paper. I was very happy and believed I could write journals in English. Now, after these months, I have enjoyed writing journals little by little and often write my friends and sister in China in English. Although I make mistakes in my journals, I think I have improved my writing abilities in English. I am not afraid of writing in English now. (Ming)

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